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TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

Leading media quoted White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan as saying Monday that the U.S. will seek clarifications from the GOI regarding an Israeli announcement that 50 new homes will be built in the West Bank settlement of Elkana. McClellan was quoted as saying: "Israel should not be expanding settlements." Maariv reported that McClellan added: "The Palestinian leaders need to act to dismantle terrorists' organizations." Maariv quoted him as saying that Sharon is moving forward on the disengagement plan. Israel Radio quoted a senior political source in Jerusalem as saying that he does not know which 50 houses are concerned. Hatzofe quoted Yehuda Cohen, the head of the Elkana local council, as saying that he has received an approval to build 700 houses in his settlement, in addition to the 50 houses in question.

Ha'aretz quoted PM Sharon as saying Monday that he plans to participate in the annual AIPAC conference in Washington next month.

All media reported that due to the mourning period in the Jewish calendar associated with the fall of both Jerusalem temples, Sharon expressed his readiness Monday to postpone the evacuation of Gaza settlements until August 15. Leading media cited severe criticism by senior IDF officers regarding logistical problems involved in the postponement.

On Sunday, Maariv reported that Finance Ministry D-G Yossi Bachar would meet senior U.S. officials this week to discuss U.S. aid for the Negev, the Galilee, and the disengagement plan, subsequent to promises President Bush gave Sharon during his visit to the U.S. The proposed USD 1 billion assistance to Israel would extend over four years.

All media reported that a non-commissioned officer was moderately wounded and an Israeli civilian lightly wounded by Palestinian sniper fire at construction workers along the Philadelphi Route on Monday afternoon. Israel Radio reported that Israel protested to the PA over the incident.

Ha'aretz reported that Israel has halted the construction of the separation fence in the area of Ariel in the northern West Bank, and quoted defense establishment sources as saying that the area is "wide open" to infiltration by terrorists.

Jerusalem Post reported that Finance Minister Binyamin Netanyahu warned, at a pre-Passover event in Ness Ziona Monday, that if Israel did not insist on reciprocity in the disengagement process, the result could be a repeat of the tragic results of Oslo. The newspaper quoted him as saying that Abbas "is not Arafat in that he is not ordering terrorist attacks himself, but he is also no Sadat and he is not King Hussein." Netanyahu said: "He is not doing anything to dismantle the terrorist organizations."

Ha'aretz reported that residents of the settlements of Ganim and Kadim in the northern West Bank have recently told Disengagement Administration Director Yonatan Bassi that they are interested in moving en masse to Afula. Maariv quoted Sephardi Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar

as saying Monday that Shas party mentor Ovadia Yosef has ruled, despite his opposition to the disengagement plan, that evacuation orders should not be opposed and that one should not call for disobedience of orders.

Ha'aretz reported that Vice Premier Shimon Peres met Monday in Paris with French President Jacques Chirac and FM Michel Barnier, who proposed hosting an international conference on assisting the PA, akin to last month's International Donors Conference on Haiti. The newspaper reported that Peres suggested focusing on economic measures, warning that political content would reintroduce the issues of Jerusalem and refugees, and stop the peace process before it had even begun.

Ha'aretz quoted Likud MK Uzi Landau as saying Monday that Iran would undoubtedly launch a nuclear attack on Israel if the Islamic republic knew that it could get away with it unharmed. Landau also said he might run for Likud candidate for PM against Sharon in the planned 2006 elections. Maariv reported that former IAF commander Eitan Ben Eliyahu told an audience at the Netanya Academic College Monday that the Iranian nuclear problem can be resolved through a joint international attack on Iran's nuclear installations, in which Israel would participate.

Ha'aretz reviewed meetings held in Beirut in late March between U.S. Mideast experts and Hamas and Hizbullah leaders, which the newspaper says shed light on the Islamists' intentions.

Yediot reported that the Egyptian Film Actors Guild has displayed a billboard opposite Cairo's Ben Ezra synagogue, portraying Sharon, Ehud Barak, Netanyahu, and the late Moshe Dayan, as "killers." The right-wing Internet site Arutz Sheva (Arutz-7) reported that the Egyptian authorities have declined to remove the poster.

Maariv and Jerusalem Post reported that Turkish PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan will visit Israel in early May -- according to Maariv, in an effort to mend the bilateral relationship. Ha'aretz reported that a joint Israeli Aircraft Industries (IAI) and Elbit Systems has won a tender to supply unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to the Turkish military, beating out competition from the U.S. company General Atomic and France. The supply contract, which was signed Monday, is worth USD 200 million.

Mideast:

Summary:

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "At this stage, the practical question facing Israel is not what can Abbas do for it, but what can it do for Abbas.... If Abbas is not strengthened now, Hamas will increase in power, and Israel will find itself handing over Gaza to a militant and uncompromising Islam, and not to a moderate secular administration."

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "The settlers did vote overwhelmingly for Sharon, but even if they had not, it should not be necessary to explain to him that he must act as their prime minister, too."

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in Ha'aretz: "The real challenge posed by an Arab democracy will be its continued striving against the legitimacy of a Jewish state."

Block Quotes:

1I. "Tighten Rules of Engagement"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (April 19): "Abbas is still a far cry from fulfilling his part of the deal offered to him by the U.S. administration: maintain control over the security mechanisms, fight terror, clean up the Palestinian Authority administration, and receive Israel's return to the road-

map track. The main difficulty facing Abbas is not American or even Israeli, but an internal one. Abbas is caught between the Fatah rock and the Hamas hard place.... At this stage, the practical question facing Israel is not what can Abbas do for it, but what can it do for Abbas. A tightening of the rules of engagement in the direction of broader risk margins would be one step in the right direction. Another step would be the release of additional Palestinian prisoners. Such a release is expected following the evacuation of Gaza, out of concern that doing it now could bolster the pullout opponents in Israel. But if Abbas is not strengthened now, Hamas will increase in power, and Israel will find itself handing over Gaza to a militant and uncompromising Islam, and not to a moderate secular administration."

II. "The Settlers' PM"

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (April 19): "Implementing disengagement with a minimum of trauma requires thinking out of the box, the more so because time is short, as well as acting with efficiency, alacrity and generosity. When Sharon was in the U.S., he set the wrong tone when he spoke of concerns about civil war. Disengagement opponents who have hinted at endorsements of violence, publicly called for refusing IDF orders and generally denied the legitimacy of government decisions should indeed be condemned. But the government should also be focused on how to treat with the utmost consideration those who will, however reluctantly but peacefully, abide by its decisions.... Encouragingly, Sharon has now set up a ministerial committee, with himself at its head, to oversee the issue of relocating Gaza's Jews. It is to be hoped that the man who oversaw Israel's astounding success in absorbing hundreds of thousands of Jews from the former Soviet Union at the turn of the 1990s can prove successful again. Disengagement should not mean disenfranchisement. Israel is disengaging from the Gaza Strip, not from the Israelis whom governments of every stripe sent there. Our newly elected leaders, in good democratic tradition, always stress that they intend to be the 'prime minister of everyone,' including those who did not vote for them. The settlers did vote overwhelmingly for Sharon, but even if they had not, it should not be necessary to explain to him that he must act as their prime minister, too."

III. "The Disturbing Aspect of Arab Democracy"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in Ha'aretz (April 19): "The 'Bush Doctrine' to advance democracy in the Arab world ... draws scant attention here in Israel, an unfortunate situation. Any change in Arab regimes will impact Israel enormously. In Jerusalem, however, this is being ignored, with the concept being treated as if it were merely a naive American fantasy.... Israel has contrasting interests: on one hand, democratic neighbors will be less threatening and will reduce the danger of war; on the other hand, Israel will lose its unique character in the region. The 'shared values' that tie it to America will belong to other countries, as well. Many Israelis fear that if the Arabs are given the freedom to choose, they will elect extreme Islamists to power. But the real challenge posed by an Arab democracy will be its continued striving against the legitimacy of a Jewish state. A very ominous sign for the future can be found in the Report on Arab Human Development, the third in a series authored by a group of intellectuals from Arab countries under the sponsorship of the United Nations Development Program.... [In contrast to the previous ones], the new report repeats the old claims and places considerable blame on Israel and the U.S. as obstacles to regional development.... [Israel's] Foreign Ministry said of the report: 'The Arab scorpion has once again stung itself.' This criticism is on the mark, but the problem goes beyond the diplomatic sparring. Israel's cumbersome efforts to court the existing regimes in the Arab region are not enough. A far-reaching soul-searching is necessary on the question of how Israel will be affected by political reforms in the region and what it must do to become part of the process, rather than be perceived as an enemy of change."

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